



NO SHAME. NO BLAME. NO NAMES.



Curriculum & Training Materials

Safely Surrendered Baby Law
&
Prevention of Infant Abandonment

1-877-BABY SAFE or 1-877-222-9723
www.babysafela.org

“Every baby deserves a chance for a healthy life.”

Acknowledgements

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“In a statement to police, Lauren explained she had wanted the baby to be found, only not in a way that could be traced to her. She didn’t want to go to an emergency room, or get prenatal care, or call anyone, because her parents would have found out. But she never wanted him to die.”

Taken from: Lauren’s Choice: A family grapples with the tragedy of a desperate act.

The Detroit Free Press

September 13, 2000

Available at www.freep.com/news/metro/aband13_20000913.htm

About this Curriculum

This curriculum is the result of a collaborative effort by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Chief Administrative Office (CAO), the Children’s Planning Council (CPC), the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN), and other community-based organizations in support of the Safe Haven Task Force recommendations approved by the Board of Supervisors on June 4, 2002. Included among the Task Force recommendations were that:

1. The director of DCFS—in consultation with the directors of the Department of Health Services, Department of Mental Health, First 5 LA, and the Hospital Association of Southern California—develop a standardized training module to be used to educate staff and the families served by their agencies about the Safe Haven Law
2. The directors of all County education, health, justice, mental health, and social service agencies are to:
 - a) Engage appropriate staff in discussions about the Safe Haven Law as part of their annual in-service staff education programs
 - b) On an ongoing basis, engage women of child-bearing age and their families in discussions about the Safe Haven Law, options for assuring the well-being of their babies, and support programs available to them
 - c) Request that the directors of all community- and faith-based educational, health, mental health, and social service organizations engage their staffs and the families they serve in these same educational activities
3. The Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect—with input and support from its public and private members—the Children’s Planning Council, faith-based organizations, and First 5 LA establish a Speaker’s Bureau to provide speakers who can make presentations to service-provider and community groups about the Safe Haven Law and support programs available for women and families at risk for abandoning their babies

This curriculum is designed to support the efforts of the County of Los Angeles to educate County employees, community-based providers, and the public about the Safe Haven Law, commonly referred to as the Safely Surrendered Baby (SSB) Law. The

curriculum is designed to provide you with key information on the SSB Law. In addition, the curriculum includes the following handouts:

- California's SSB Law Fact Sheets (English and Spanish)
- Clarifying Legal and Procedural Issues in the Safely Surrendered Baby Law
- Adoption Information
- Social and Psychological Factors of Unintended Pregnancy & Infant Abandonment
- Information and Referral Hotlines
- County of Los Angeles Safe Surrender Sites

Camera-ready versions of these materials have been provided in a supplementary packet for distribution to the audience.

Divided into separate training modules, the curriculum can be used in a variety of settings and with a variety of audiences. While we recommend that you share the entire curriculum with participants, each module can be used independently, in or out of sequence, to allow the trainer to tailor the information to the expertise and educational goals of the audience.

Learning Objectives:

At the conclusion of the entire training curriculum, participants will:

1. Understand the health and legal details of the Safely Surrendered Baby Law
2. Understand the options available to parents who do not want to keep their child
3. Understand some of the social, cultural, and psychological aspects of child abandonment
4. Understand possible techniques for assisting women who conceal their pregnancies
5. Be able to locate and inform others of Safe Surrender sites, as well as resources for pregnant parents, in the County of Los Angeles

Module I: **Introduction**

Objective: Participants will receive an overview of the purpose of the Safely Surrendered Baby Law and the scope of the problem in the County of Los Angeles.

Materials: Chart/blackboard/dry-erase board to record participant response (optional)

Recommended Time: 20 minutes

Teaching Technique: Lecture and/or facilitated discussion

Trainer's Note: Familiarize yourself with the following information before using this curriculum. It provides an overview of the history and importance of providing a "Safe Haven" for infants who would otherwise be abandoned.

Training: Depending upon your audience and allotted time, you can read the following section aloud (either in its entirety or the parts that seem most pertinent to the participants) or you can engage the participants in a discussion of their knowledge of the SSB Law. Ask them what they know about the Law, where "Safe Surrender" sites are located in their communities, and how they think this training might be useful, given their field of expertise. This is particularly useful if you plan to review "lessons learned" with the group at the conclusion of the training.

Introduction

Two stuffed teddy bears mark the graves of Baby Boy Johnson #1 and Baby Boy Johnson #2; infants denied their chance at life. Their mother, Kimberly Johnson, age 26, now resides in state prison serving a sentence of 25 years to life for the murder of her twin infant boys. Kimberly had given birth to the infant boys in her bathroom at home, wrapped them each in a towel, put the towels into a plastic bag and put the plastic bags into a laundry detergent box.

Such a story seems impossible to believe, but sadly, many babies each year all over the United States are left to die after they are abandoned or killed by their parents. California, like many states, has enacted the Safely Surrendered Baby Law ("Law") that allows a parent to legally, confidentially and safely give up a baby within the first 72 hours of the baby's life. This law is designed to protect a baby from being abandoned (which is illegal) and to offer a last resort to parents who, in a time of severe emotional distress, may otherwise believe they have no other options.

Despite this Law, adoption has always been and continues to be an option for parents whom, for whatever reason, cannot care for an infant. In fact, legal adoption is the best option as it affords rights to the parent placing the child for adoption and best serves the needs of the adopted child and the adoptive parents. The Safely Surrendered Baby Law has been enacted in hope that by allowing a parent to safely surrender a child to an employee at a hospital emergency room or fire station, those who believe they have no other option but to abandon a child in an unsafe manner will at least take this step of last resort, thus ensuring their child's safety and their freedom from prosecution.

Background

In 1999, Texas experienced a number of highly publicized cases of parents abandoning infants. As a result, Texas passed the first “Safe Haven Law” in March 1999. In the aftermath of these cases, nationwide publicity of these and similar events escalated and policy-makers across the nation began to implement legislation similar to the law enacted in Texas. Since that time, 40 other states have passed legislation intended to prevent the abandonment of children by their parents. In January 2001, California enacted its own Safely Surrendered Baby Law, which states that:

“no parent or other person, who has lawful custody of a minor child, 72 hours old or younger, may be prosecuted for child abandonment if he or she voluntarily surrenders physical custody of the child to a designated employee at a public or private emergency room.”

In response to this Law, and to address the growing number of abandonments occurring in the County of Los Angeles, the Board of Supervisors asked that the Children’s Planning Council, in consultation with the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN), the Commission on Children and Families, the Healthcare Association of Southern California, the Los Angeles County Children and Families First–Proposition 10 Commission (now known as First 5 LA), religious leaders, and other appropriate organizations develop recommendations on how to effectively implement the Safely Surrendered Baby Law. This curriculum is a direct result of the recommendations, made by the Task Force, to the Board of Supervisors.

Scope of Problem

Unfortunately, it is very difficult to know the number of children who die each year as a result of abandonment. While many abandoned children are discovered, it is possible that countless others are never found, complicating our ability to fully understand the extent of the problem. However, a key recommendation of the Safe Haven Task Force was to instruct ICAN and the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to develop a data collection system to capture data on all known abandonments and safe surrenders in the County of Los Angeles. **[NOTE TO TRAINER: It is important to provide the most recent data if participants inquire. That data can be viewed on the County’s website—www.babysafela.org—under “How Many Babies Have Been Safely Surrendered in Los Angeles County?”]** As a result of this data collection effort, we have learned that in 2001, the first year the Law was implemented, there were no safe surrenders and 14 abandonments. Since 2002, when implementation of the Task Force recommendations began, the County of Los Angeles has had several safe surrenders. However, during the same time period, the County still experienced infant abandonments.

Module II:

Key Elements of the Safely Surrendered Baby Law

Objective: Participants will understand health and legal details of the Safely Surrendered Baby Law.

Materials: Chart/blackboard/dry-erase board to record participant response (optional), Handout 5 (Susan's Story), Handouts 1 and 2 (Safely Surrendered Baby Law Fact Sheet), Handout 3 (Clarifying Legal and Procedural Issues in the Safely Surrendered Baby Law)

Recommended Time: 20 minutes

Trainer's Note: This module should entail reading and facilitated discussion

Training: Allow participants five minutes to read over Handout 5. This will provide the opportunity to ask the participants any combination of the following:

- 1) Why did Susan know she could safely surrender her baby at the hospital?
- 2) If you thought a friend was concealing her pregnancy, would you ask her if she were pregnant?
- 3) What are some of the aspects of the Safely Surrendered Baby Law, according to the reading?
- 4) What if Susan had not seen the poster for the Safely Surrendered Baby Law?

You will want to record the answers if possible, so that you can review them as you reveal possible answers, which might include:

- 1) The Safe Haven poster in the clinic. You may discuss the fact that posters, billboards, and bumper stickers similar to this are up around the County of Los Angeles in the hopes that through informal communication networks and word-of-mouth, information about the SSB Law will be shared throughout the communities of Los Angeles.
- 2) Responses will vary. Some will find it difficult to believe that someone did not intervene sooner to acknowledge that Susan was pregnant. Others will say yes, arguing that it would be impossible for them not to know if a friend was pregnant, while the rest might find it difficult to decide what they would do.
- 3) Participants may cite that:
 - Safe Surrender sites include hospitals.
 - Children who are safely surrendered may be reclaimed for up to 14 days.
 - Parents who surrender their baby are given an ID tag to confirm their identity.
 - Parents who surrender their baby are given an opportunity to leave important information about the medical history of the infant's family.
 - Babies who are surrendered are eventually placed in adoptive homes.

4) Responses may include:

- She would go to prison if she murdered her child.
- She would give him/her up for adoption.
- It is difficult to say what someone who conceals her pregnancy might do.

Following this discussion, participants should refer to Handout 1 and 2 (Safely Surrendered Baby Fact Sheet) and Handout 3 (Clarifying Legal and Procedural Issues). Lead participants through a review of the key aspects of the Safely Surrendered Baby Law. Allow them the opportunity to discuss the various aspects of the law and help them to understand the implications of the law, particularly as they apply it to their agency, community-based organization, clients, and community.

[NOTE TO TRAINER: Let participants know that they can find this scenario on Handout 5, Susan's Story.]

Susan's Story

Susan, a 21-year old single Asian woman, became pregnant by a casual acquaintance she met at a fraternity party. Susan was a junior in college in New York and did not discover that she was pregnant until she was five months along and the father was nowhere to be found. She did not feel capable of having an abortion while carrying a 5-month gestational fetus and struggled with what to do about her pregnancy. She realized that she would be returning to her family's home for summer break near the time she was due and did not want her parents to know of her pregnancy.

Susan returned to her parents' home in an upper-class suburb of Los Angeles when she was seven months' pregnant. Although her parents observed her weight gain, she explained it as "dorm food" and her parents believed her. She was very confused and afraid, so she continued to hide her pregnancy. One day she began having some pain and decided she should go to a clinic to be examined. She was examined and the clinic doctor told her that she was only having some slight contractions. She did not put her correct name or address on the clinic forms and refused all offers of assistance. However, while at the clinic, she saw a poster that advertised "Safely Surrender Your Baby," a law that would allow her to confidentially leave her baby in a hospital emergency room without prosecution for child abandonment.

Two months later Susan gave birth alone in her family's bathroom while her parents were at work. She wrapped her baby in a sheet and drove herself and her newborn daughter to a local hospital emergency room where she turned the child over to an emergency room nurse. She asked the nurse what would happen to her child and was told that the baby would be placed for adoption unless Susan returned within 14 days to reclaim the child. The nurse asked Susan to complete a medical form regarding her medical history so that the child and the child's adoptive family would have this information and gave Susan an ID bracelet that would identify her as the baby's mother in the event she wished to reclaim the child. Susan took the medical history form with her and left the hospital without obtaining recommended medical treatment for herself. She was afraid, but believed she was doing the right thing for her baby and herself. She completed the medical questionnaire at home and mailed it to the hospital in the envelope they had provided.

Susan did not return to the hospital to reclaim her child and the baby was placed for adoption with a couple who had been approved by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Adoptions Division. The couple had waited several years to adopt and was thrilled to adopt the baby, whom they named Nicolette. They are grateful to Nicolette's birth mother and were pleased to have medical information for their child; however, they wish the mother had provided identifying information to the adoption agency so that Nicolette could make connection with her birth relatives when she is older, if she desires to do so.

*Names have been changed.

Safely Surrendered Baby Law Fact Sheet (English)

No shame.

No blame.

No names.

**Newborns can be safely given up
at any Los Angeles County
hospital emergency room or fire station.**



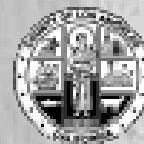
**In Los Angeles County:
1-877-BABY SAFE
1-877-222-9723
www.babysafela.org**



**State of California
Gray Davis, Governor**

**Health and Human Services Agency
Grantland Johnson, Secretary**

**Department of Social Services
Rita Saenz, Director**



**Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors
Gloria Molina, Supervisor, First District
Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Supervisor, Second District
Zev Yaroslavsky, Supervisor, Third District
Don Knabe, Supervisor, Fourth District
Michael D. Antonovich, Supervisor, Fifth District**

This initiative is also supported by First 5 LA and INFO LINE of Los Angeles.

Safely Surrendered Baby Law Fact Sheet (English)

What is the Safely Surrendered Baby Law?

California's Safely Surrendered Baby Law allows parents to give up their baby confidentially. As long as the baby has not been abused or neglected, parents may give up their newborn without fear of arrest or prosecution.

How does it work?

A distressed parent who is unable or unwilling to care for a baby can legally, confidentially and safely give up a baby within three days of birth. The baby must be handed to an employee at a Los Angeles County emergency room or fire station. As long as the child shows no signs of abuse or neglect, no name or other information is required. In case the parent changes his or her mind at a later date and wants the baby back, workers will use bracelets to help connect them to each other. One bracelet will be placed on the baby, and a matching bracelet will be given to the parent.

What if a parent wants the baby back?

Parents who change their minds can begin the process of reclaiming their newborns within 14 days. These parents should call the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services at 1-800-540-4000.

Can only a parent bring in the baby?

In most cases, a parent will bring in the baby. The law allows other people to bring in the baby if they have legal custody.

Does the parent have to call before bringing in the baby?

No. A parent can bring in a baby anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week so long as the parent gives the baby to someone who works at the hospital or fire station.

Does a parent have to tell anything to the people taking the baby?

No. However, hospital personnel will ask the parent to fill out a questionnaire designed to gather important medical history information, which is very useful in caring for the child. Although encouraged, filling out the questionnaire is not required.

What happens to the baby?

The baby will be examined and given medical treatment, if needed. Then the baby will be placed in a pre-adoptive home.

What happens to the parent?

Once the parent(s) has safely turned over the baby, they are free to go.

Why is California doing this?

The purpose of the Safely Surrendered Baby Law is to protect babies from being abandoned by their parents and potentially being hurt or killed. You may have heard tragic stories of babies left in dumpsters or public bathrooms. The parents who committed these acts may have been under severe emotional distress. The mothers may have hidden their pregnancies, fearful of what would happen if their families found out. Because they were afraid and had nowhere to turn for help, they abandoned their infants. Abandoning a baby puts the child in extreme danger. It is also illegal. Too often, it results in the baby's death. Because of the Safely Surrendered Baby Law, this tragedy doesn't ever have to happen in California again.

A baby's story

At 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, July 25, 2002, a healthy newborn baby was brought to St. Bernardino Medical Center in San Bernardino under the provisions of the California Safely Surrendered Baby Law. As the law states, the baby's mother did not have to identify herself. When the baby was brought to the emergency room, he was examined by a pediatrician, who determined that the baby was healthy and doing fine. He was placed with a loving family while the adoption process was started.

Every baby deserves a chance for a healthy life. If someone you know is considering abandoning a newborn, let her know there are other options.

It is best that women seek help to receive proper medical care and counseling while they are pregnant. But at the same time, we want to assure parents who choose not to keep their baby that they will not go to jail if they deliver their babies to safe hands in any Los Angeles County hospital ER or fire station.

Safely Surrendered Baby Law Fact Sheet (Spanish)

Sin pena. Sin culpa. Sin peligro.

**Los recién nacidos pueden ser entregados
en forma segura en la sala de emergencia de
cualquier hospital o en un cuartel de bomberos
del Condado de Los Angeles.**



En el Condado de Los Angeles:

1-877-BABY SAFE

1-877-222-9723

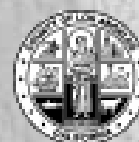
www.babysafela.org



Estado de California
Gray Davis, Gobernador

Agencia de Salud y Servicios Humanos
(Health and Human Services Agency)
Grantland Johnson, Secretario

Departamento de Servicios Sociales
(Department of Social Services)
Rita Saenz, Directora



Consejo de Supervisores del Condado de Los Angeles

Gloria Molina, Supervisora, Primer Distrito

Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Supervisora, Segundo Distrito

Zev Yaroslavsky, Supervisor, Tercer Distrito

Don Knabe, Supervisor, Cuarto Distrito

Michael D. Antonovich, Supervisor, Quinto Distrito

Esta iniciativa también está apollada por First 5 LA y INFO LINE de Los Angeles.

Safely Surrendered Baby Law Fact Sheet (Spanish)

¿Qué es la Ley de Entrega de Bebés Sin Peligro?

La Ley de Entrega de Bebés Sin Peligro de California permite a los padres entregar a su recién nacido confidencialmente.

Siempre que el bebé no haya sufrido abuso ni negligencia, padres pueden entregar a su recién nacido sin temor a ser arrestados o procesados.

¿Cómo funciona?

El padre/madre con dificultades que no pueda o no quiera cuidar de su recién nacido puede entregarlo en forma legal, confidencial y segura, dentro de los tres días del nacimiento. El bebé debe ser entregado a un empleado de una sala de emergencias o de un cuartel de bomberos del Condado de Los Angeles. Siempre que el bebé no presente signos de abuso o negligencia, no será necesario suministrar nombres ni información alguna. Si el padre/madre cambia de opinión posteriormente y desea recuperar a su bebé, los trabajadores utilizarán brazaletes para poder vincularlos. El bebé llevará un brazalete y el padre/madre recibirá un brazalete igual.

¿Qué pasa si el padre/madre desea recuperar a su bebé?

Los padres que cambian de opinión pueden empezar el proceso de reclamar a su recién nacido dentro de los 14 días. Estos padres deberán llamar al Departamento de Servicios para Niños y Familias (Department of Children and Family Services) del Condado de Los Angeles, al 1-800-540-4000.

¿Solo los padres podrán llevar al recién nacido?

En la mayoría de los casos, los padres son los que llevan al bebé. La ley permite que otras personas lleven al bebé si tienen la custodia legal del menor.

¿Los padres deben llamar antes de llevar al bebé?

No. El padre/madre puede llevar a su bebé en cualquier momento, las 24 horas del día, los 7 días de la semana, mientras que entregue a su bebé a un empleado del hospital o de un cuartel de bomberos.

¿Es necesario que el padre/madre diga algo a las personas que reciben al bebé?

No. Sin embargo, el personal del hospital le pedirá que llene un cuestionario con la finalidad de recabar antecedentes médicos importantes, que resultan de gran utilidad para los cuidados que recibirá el bebé. Es recomendado llenar este cuestionario, pero no es obligatorio hacerlo.

¿Qué ocurrirá con el bebé?

El bebé será examinado y, de ser necesario, recibirá tratamiento médico. Luego el bebé se entregará a un hogar preadoptivo.

¿Qué pasará con el padre/madre?

Una vez que los padres hayan entregado a su bebé en forma segura, serán libres de irse.

¿Por qué California hace esto?

La finalidad de la Ley de Entrega de Bebés Sin Peligro es proteger a los bebés del abandono por parte de sus padres y de la posibilidad de que mueran o sufran daños. Usted probablemente haya escuchado historias trágicas sobre bebés abandonados en basureros o en baños públicos. Es posible que los padres que cometieron estos actos hayan estado atravesando dificultades emocionales graves. Las madres pueden haber ocultado su embarazo, por temor a lo que pasaría si sus familias se enteraran. Abandonaron a sus recién nacidos porque tenían miedo y no tenían adonde acudir para obtener ayuda. El abandono de un recién nacido lo pone en una situación de peligro extremo. Además es ilegal. Muy a menudo el abandono provoca la muerte del bebé. Ahora, gracias a la Ley de Entrega de Bebés Sin Peligro, esta tragedia ya no debe suceder nunca más en California.

Historia de un bebé

A las 8:30 a.m. del jueves 25 de julio de 2002, se entregó un bebé recién nacido saludable en el St. Bernardino Medical Center en San Bernardino, en virtud de las disposiciones de la Ley de Entrega de Bebés Sin Peligro. Como lo establece la ley, la madre del bebé no se tuvo que identificar. Cuando el bebé llegó a la sala de emergencias, un pediatra lo revisó y determinó que el bebé estaba saludable y no tenía problemas. El bebé fue ubicado con una buena familia, mientras se iniciaban los trámites de adopción.

Cada recién nacido merece una oportunidad de tener una vida saludable. Si alguien que usted conoce está pensando en abandonar a un recién nacido, infórmele qué otras opciones tiene.

Es mejor que las mujeres busquen ayuda para recibir atención médica y asesoramiento adecuado durante el embarazo. Pero al mismo tiempo, queremos asegurarnos a los padres que optan por no quedarse con su bebé que no irán a la cárcel si dejan a sus bebés en buenas manos en cualquier sala de emergencia de un hospital o en un cuartel de bomberos del Condado de Los Angeles.

Clarifying Legal and Procedural Issues in the Safely Surrendered Baby Law

On January 1, 2001, a new law in California went into effect. Known as the “Safely Surrendered Baby Law,” the law states that **“no parent or other person who has lawful custody of a minor child 72 hours old or younger may be prosecuted for child abandonment if he or she voluntarily surrenders physical custody of the child to an employee at a public or private emergency room.”** Newborns may also be safely surrendered at Los Angeles County Fire Department stations and other fire stations designated by the County Board of Supervisors.

The following are common questions and answers regarding the legal provisions and procedures included in the Law:

- **What is the Safely Surrendered Baby Law?**

California’s Safely Surrendered Baby Law allows parents to confidentially give up their baby, 72 hours or younger. As long as the baby has not been abused or neglected, parents may give up their newborn without fear of arrest or prosecution.

- **The law guarantees confidentiality to the surrendering adult. What does this mean?**

A parent who safely surrenders a baby does not have to give her name. If a parent chooses to give her name or other identifying information, only individuals who need to know the identity and whereabouts of a surrendering parent will have access to such information, thus guaranteeing confidentiality. Such individuals may include the judge and the attorneys in court who ensure that the baby is safe and placed in a pre-adoptive home.

- **Who does the law allow to bring the baby to a Safe Surrender site?**

The law allows the parent or other person with lawful custody to bring the baby to a Safe Surrender site.

- **Does the law allow a parent to leave his or her newborn at the entrance of a Safe Surrender site?**

NO. To ensure the safety of the newborn, the parent or person with lawful custody must give his or her baby to an employee of the Safe Surrender site.

- **Does the parent have to tell anything to the person taking the baby at the Safe Surrender site?**

NO. However, the parent will be asked to fill out a questionnaire designed to gather important medical history information, which is very useful in caring for the baby. Although filling out the questionnaire is not required, it is encouraged. If she wishes, the parent can take the questionnaire home and mail it back to the hospital once it has been completed. The medical questionnaire does not require any information that would compromise the confidentiality of the parent.

Clarifying Legal and Procedural Issues in the Safely Surrendered Baby Law
(continued)

- **What is the process for a parent to reclaim his or her child within the 14-day timeframe outlined in the Safe Surrender Law?**

Within 14 days from the date a parent surrenders a baby, the parent should call the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services Child Protection Hotline at 1-800-540-4000. A social worker will meet with the parent and assess his or her home to determine whether the baby can be safely returned to the parent.

- **What happens if a parent wants to reclaim his or her child after the 14-day timeframe?**

A parent should call the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services Child Protection Hotline at 1-800-540-4000. Because the baby's case will be in court, the parent may have to attend court hearings in addition to meeting with social workers and having his or her home assessed.

- **What is the purpose of the identification bracelet that is placed on the infant and provided to the surrendering adult at the Safe Surrender site?**

The bracelet assists the social workers in determining who a baby's parents may be in those cases where a parent requests the baby back. The bracelet does not establish parentage or right to custody of the child.

- **What happens to the baby if a parent does not attempt to reclaim his or her child?**

Upon receiving the surrendered baby, social workers immediately place the baby in a safe and loving home and begin the adoption process.

Module III: **Safe Surrender vs. Adoption**

Objective: Participants will understand the options available to parents who do not want to keep their child.

Materials: Chart/blackboard/dry-erase board to record participant responses (optional), and Handout 4 (Adoption Information)

Recommended Time: 10 minutes

Teaching Technique: Lecture and/or facilitated discussion

Trainer's Note: If you are running over schedule or have less time to conduct the training, you may review Handout 4 and address any questions from the participants. Remember that any questions you do not feel comfortable answering should be referred to the Los Angeles County Adoption Hotline at (888) 811-1121.

Training: Open by asking participants, "What do you think might be the differences between adoption and surrender?" and "Why might one be preferable over the other?" You can record participant responses to refer back to later in the lesson.

Once you have discussed the differences and reasons why adoption is preferable to surrender, have participants refer to Handout 4 (Adoption Information). Review this material with them and tell them that if they have any specific questions, they can call the Los Angeles County Adoption Hotline: at (888) 811-1121.

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Adoption Information

Pregnant women who do not believe they have the means, ability and/or desire to parent their baby may choose to put the child up for adoption. Legal adoption is the best option for a parent who is unable to care for a child, as it affords rights to the parent placing the child for adoption and best serves the needs of the adopted child and the adoptive parents. Babies carried to term can be voluntarily relinquished for adoption, which preserves the life of the infant, creates a new, loving family, and offers the relinquishing parent additional psychological benefits without fear of criminal prosecution.

The following information answers many common questions birth parents may have regarding putting their babies up for adoption:

- “Relinquishment of a child” means the action of a parent who signs a relinquishment form in which he or she surrenders custody, control and any responsibility for the care and support of the child to any licensed public or private adoption agency for purposes of adoption.
- Parents can designate a family to adopt their child; however, the child cannot be placed with the new family until they have an approved home study.
- If the birth parent does not designate a particular family, the adoption agency selects the adoptive family, although the birth parent may participate in this process. Every effort is made to honor reasonable requests of the birth parents.
- Birth parents may meet the adoptive parents if all parties agree.
- Birth parents may select a religion for their child.
- Any parent can sign a relinquishment. Minor children who are parents, do not need their parent’s consent to relinquish.
- Relinquishment must be entirely voluntary. The court cannot order a parent to sign a relinquishment.
- A relinquishment may only be taken by a social worker from a licensed adoption agency.
- There can be no bribes, payments or promises made in exchange for a relinquishment.

Adoption Information
(continued)

- The birth parent's legal rights and responsibilities for the child end when the relinquishment is reviewed and filed by the California Department of Social Services and the acknowledgement is issued.
- Parents may request to revoke (before the relinquishment is filed) or rescind (after the relinquishment is filed) the relinquishment, but this request will be granted only with the consent of the adoption agency.
- Parents must be informed that there are services available which may help them keep their child prior to the taking of a relinquishment. These services include: legal consultation, financial resources, employment resources, education, child care, housing, health services and counseling.

In addition to the voluntary relinquishment of a child through the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Adoption Division, parents may also arrange for adoption of their child through a private, licensed adoption agency or through an independent adoption with the assistance of an attorney.

For more information on the voluntary relinquishment of a newborn for purposes of adoption, please call the Los Angeles County Adoption Hotline:

(888) 811-1121

Module IV: **Social and Psychological Aspects of Child Abandonment**

Objective: Participants will understand some of the social, cultural and psychological aspects of child abandonment.

Materials: Chart/blackboard/dry-erase board to record participant responses (optional), Handout 5 (Juana's Story), and Handout 6 (Social and Psychological Factors of Unintended Pregnancy & Infant Abandonment)

Recommended Time: 20 minutes

Teaching Technique: Reading and facilitated discussion

Trainer's Note: This activity is designed to eliminate participants' preconceived notions about individuals who might abandon their baby. For the most part, no concrete "profile" exists for the documented cases of baby abandonment.

Training:

You may open this module by asking participants to read Handout 5. When they are finished, ask them to recall the earlier reading about a young woman named Susan. Ask participants, "What do you think are the characteristics of a parent who might abandon his or her baby?" You may want to document these responses to compare to the actual "profile."

After you finish recording their responses, have participants turn to Handout 6 (Social and Psychological Factors of Unintended Pregnancy & Infant Abandonment). Review with them the common characteristics of parents who abandon their babies from the handout.

Juana's Story

Juana*, a 19-year old Latina, and her husband Frank, a 20-year old African American, lived with Frank's parents in a middle class neighborhood in East Los Angeles. Juana and Frank were married two years prior, shortly after Juana became pregnant with their daughter, Julie. Neither Juana's or Frank's parents were pleased when Juana became pregnant because the couple had plans to attend college, and these plans were thwarted by their early parenthood. Frank's parents agreed to let the young couple and child live in their home but did not hesitate to express their displeasure that they had to financially support the couple.

Although Juana and Frank were careful, Juana again became pregnant. The couple was terrified that both sets of parents would be angry with them, as the couple could not afford to care for Julie let alone a new baby. Juana would not consider abortion as it violated her religious beliefs and, although the couple discussed adoption, they made no efforts to contact an adoption agency. They later stated that they "just wished it would go away." They hid Juana's pregnancy and told no one of her condition.

Juana went into labor in her eighth month of pregnancy while Frank was out playing pool with friends. She gave birth by herself in her bathroom, cut the umbilical cord and wrapped her newborn son tightly in plastic bags to prevent him from crying. After her in-laws had gone to bed, she placed the plastic bag in a trash dumpster near their home. The infant was found deceased in the dumpster by a transient who notified law enforcement. Coroner records indicate that the child died of asphyxiation and caregiver neglect and the death was classified as a homicide. Juana was eventually located by police who traced her by way of a receipt found in the plastic bag in which the infant died. She was arrested for Penal Code 187, murder, and awaits trial at this time.

*Names have been changed.

Susan's Story

Susan, a 21-year old single Asian woman, became pregnant by a casual acquaintance she met at a fraternity party. Susan was a junior in college in New York and did not discover that she was pregnant until she was five months along and the father was nowhere to be found. She did not feel capable of having an abortion while carrying a 5-month gestational fetus and struggled with what to do about her pregnancy. She realized that she would be returning to her family's home for summer break near the time she was due and did not want her parents to know of her pregnancy.

Susan returned to her parents' home in an upper-class suburb of Los Angeles when she was seven months pregnant. Although her parents observed her weight gain, she explained it as "dorm food" and her parents believed her. She was very confused and afraid, so she continued to hide her pregnancy. One day she began having some pain

and decided she should go to a clinic to be examined. She was examined and the clinic doctor told her that she was only having some slight contractions. She did not put her correct name or address on the clinic forms and refused all offers of assistance. However, while at the clinic, she saw a poster that advertised “Safely Surrender Your Baby,” a law that would allow her to confidentially leave her baby in a hospital emergency room without prosecution for child abandonment.

Two months later Susan gave birth alone in her family’s bathroom while her parents were at work. She wrapped her baby in a sheet and drove herself and her newborn daughter to a local hospital emergency room where she turned the child over to an emergency room nurse. She asked the nurse what would happen to her child and was told that the baby would be placed for adoption unless Susan returned within 14 days to reclaim the child. The nurse asked Susan to complete a medical form regarding her medical history so that the child and the child’s adoptive family would have this information and gave Susan an ID bracelet that would identify her as the baby’s mother in the event she wished to reclaim the child. Susan took the medical history form with her and left the hospital without obtaining recommended medical treatment for herself. She was afraid, but believed she was doing the right thing for her baby and herself. She completed the medical questionnaire at home and mailed it to the hospital in the envelope they had provided.

Susan did not return to the hospital to reclaim her child and the baby was placed for adoption with a couple who had been approved by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Adoptions Division. The couple had waited several years to adopt and was thrilled to adopt the baby, whom they named Nicolette. They are grateful to Nicolette’s birth mother and were pleased to have medical information for their child; however, they wish the mother had provided identifying information to the adoption agency so that Nicolette could make connection with her birth relatives when she is older, if she desires to do so.

Social and Psychological Factors of Unintended Pregnancy & Infant Abandonment

The two scenarios above, based upon real incidents, depict two very different outcomes to an unwanted pregnancy. The choices these women made have had a lasting impact on the health and well-being of their babies as well as their own futures.

While efforts are currently underway in the County of Los Angeles to collect more data on women who abandon their infants, current data reveal that parents involved in these cases do not fit a generalized “profile.” Infant abandonment and newborn surrender have been reported among girls and women of all reproductive ages, among all racial/ethnic groups, and across all socio-economic and educational levels. In addition, some cases have been reported of fathers assisting in the abandonment or safe surrender of their infants.

While parents who abandon or safely surrender their babies do not appear to fit a distinctive “risk profile,” some common characteristics have emerged in many of these cases. These include:

- Denial and/or concealment of the pregnancy;
- Lack of a support system for the mother;
- The mother’s fear of the “system” (i.e. child welfare workers, law enforcement, hospital personnel);
- Fear that the pregnancy will be discovered by parents, spouse, boyfriend, or peers;
- Lack of pre-natal care;
- Lack of typical pregnancy related symptoms;
- Childbirth occurs outside of a hospital or without the assistance of trained medical professionals; and
- The mother’s family and/or friends have knowledge of the pregnancy but collude in the mother’s denial or concealment of her pregnancy.

Module V: **Assisting a Woman Who Conceals her Pregnancy**

Objective: Participants will understand possible techniques for assisting a woman who is concealing her pregnancy.

Materials: Chart/blackboard/dry-erase board to record participant responses (optional), Handout 7 (How Can You Help A Pregnant Woman Make a Safe Choice?)

Recommended Time: 15 minutes

Teaching Technique: Facilitated discussion

Training: Ask participants, “What do you think you would do if you suspected that a friend or family member was concealing a pregnancy?” You may record everyone’s responses.

Share with participants that someone who conceals a pregnancy—whether it is the mother, father, or someone else close to the child—puts both the mother and the child at risk. Acknowledge that, having said that, it is still a difficult topic to discuss with anyone you may suspect is concealing a pregnancy. It may be difficult for some participants to comprehend what would make someone conceal a pregnancy. It may be difficult for others to think of sensitive ways to talk about such an issue with their friend or family member. Refer back to the responses people provided when you asked a similar question after reading Susan’s story earlier in the workshop.

Have participants turn to Handout 7, which covers the importance of broaching this sensitive issue with someone you suspect is concealing a pregnancy and possible recommendations about doing so. Review the handout and allow time for discussion about the contents.

How Can You Help A Pregnant Woman Make a Safe Choice?

Women facing an unintended pregnancy often experience initial reactions of fear, anger, and confusion upon learning that they are pregnant. In some instances, women do not know they are pregnant for many months or are in denial of the pregnancy. Often the loving support and understanding of a friend or family member is all that is needed to help a woman dealing with an unintended pregnancy make safe and legal choices.

If you suspect your daughter, friend, wife, or relative is pregnant, and believe she is denying or concealing the pregnancy, you have a responsibility to do the following:

- Ask her if she is pregnant;
- Acknowledge the pregnancy in a non-judgmental manner;
- Provide her with information on her options and offer support, love and guidance so that she can make an informed decision about how best to handle the unintended pregnancy;
- Assist her in finding a doctor or health clinic to receive pre-natal care to protect her health and the health of the baby;
- Provide her with the emotional support she needs during this often confusing and difficult time.

Often women facing an unintended pregnancy are afraid to share their secret with anyone, even close family and friends. If you suspect someone close to you is denying or concealing a pregnancy, please reach out to her and offer your support and assistance. By doing so, you will help a woman make a safe choice about her pregnancy.

If you suspect someone close to you is in this situation, have the courage to reach out to her to make a difference in her life and the life of the baby.

Module VI: **Additional Resources**

Materials: Handout 8 (Information and Referral Hotlines)

Recommended Time: 5 minutes

Teaching Technique: Facilitated discussion

Training: Ask participants to turn to Handout 8 (Information and Referral Hotlines). Review with them this list of possible sources of information concerning the Safely Surrendered Baby Law, and resources available to pregnant parents.

Ask them if they are aware of additional sources of support for pregnant parents in their own community. Share with them that, because of the nature of this dilemma, it is important to remember that some of these parents may turn to local organizations, places of worship, and their community networks to cope with their pregnancy. We must be mindful that the more we can spread the word about the SSB Law, the more we can ensure that someone will be there when a pregnant parent comes forward looking for assistance in making some very difficult decisions.

Closing

If you have time, you should review “lessons learned” with participants. What aspects of the training were helpful to the participants and what aspects were not as helpful? How can we continue to work with them to make sure we are able to effectively communicate this information to a wider audience?

Thank them for coming and make sure they know that if they have questions, they can call any of the numbers listed on Handout 8 (Information and Referral Hotlines).

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Information and Referral Hotlines

Information on a variety of issues related to pregnancy, adoption and the safe surrender of a baby can be found by calling:

Safely Surrendered Baby Hotline

The Safely Surrendered Baby Hotline is sponsored by Info Line of Los Angeles. Staff trained in the provisions of the Safely Surrendered Baby Law provide information on how to safely surrender a baby under the law, as well as the location of Safe Surrender sites. This hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Calls to the Safely Surrendered Baby Hotline are confidential, and English, Spanish and 140 other languages are spoken. The Safely Surrendered Baby Hotline may be reached at:

1-877-222-9723

Info Line of Los Angeles

Info Line of Los Angeles is a free, 24 hours a day, seven days a week information and referral hotline, with specialists fluent in English and Spanish and interpreters available in other languages. The hotline provides confidential information and referrals on family problems, health services, legal services, substance abuse programs, counseling, family planning, youth programs, mental health services and other social services. Info Line may be reached at:

1-800-339-6993

First 5 LA Connect

First 5 LA Connect is a free phone helpline for parents of newborns and young children. First 5 LA Connect is available seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., with specialists fluent in English and Spanish and interpreters available in other languages. The service links callers with trained specialists and health experts who can answer key parenting questions, and refer them directly to Los Angeles County agencies that offer free or low-cost services. First 5 LA Connect is a service of First 5 LA, which is dedicated to improving the lives of children in Los Angeles County during their first 5 years of life. First 5 LA may be reached at:

1-888-347-7855

Los Angeles County Adoption Hotline

The Hotline provides information on the voluntary relinquishment of a newborn for purposes of adoption. The Hotline may be reached at:

1-888-811-1121

Module VII: **Safe Surrender Sites**

Objective: Participants will be able to locate and inform others of Safe Haven sites in the Los Angeles County.

Materials: Chart/blackboard/dry-erase board to record participant response (optional), Handout 9 (Safe Surrender Site Flyer)

Recommended Time: 5 minutes

Teaching Technique: Facilitated discussion

Training: Ask participants if they know of a Safe Surrender site in their community or in the community in which they work. You may record some of the locations just to provide participants with an idea of the location and number of sites in the County of Los Angeles. Remind them that all hospital emergency rooms are designated as Safe Surrender site for newborns in the County of Los Angeles. In addition, the Board of Supervisors has designated fire stations throughout the County. Encourage participants to call the Safely Surrendered Baby Hotline or go to the website to find designated sites in their communities.

Share with them the Safely Surrendered Baby Site Document and the materials that have been produced to market the Safe Surrender sites and the SSB Law (including the pocket cards, flyers, and logo).

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES SAFE SURRENDER SITES

NEWBORNS CAN BE SAFELY GIVEN UP IN
THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES AT:

- **ANY HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM**
- **ANY DESIGNATED FIRE STATION**

TO FIND A SAFE SURRENDER SITE NEAR YOU VISIT:

WWW.BABYSAFELA.ORG

OR CALL

877-BABY SAFE *

(877-222-9723)

* SPONSORED BY INFO LINE OF LOS ANGELES

